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Latin America

REGIONAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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LATIN AMERICA
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This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence and from other agencies within the Intelligence Community. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Focus on Human Rights

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This is the first in a series of monthly articles that will appear in this publication dealing with human rights on a regional basis. Today's commentary was written by ORPA's [redacted] *We hope that this and subsequent articles will generate a dialogue among readers of this publication. Questions and comments may be addressed to the author.*

After six months of quiet diplomacy, public statements, and implied warnings of possible reductions in military and economic assistance, Latin American government leaders have become convinced of the sincerity of the US commitment to the defense of human rights. More importantly, they are beginning to respond to the policy and are, at least, sensitized to the principle that rule of law and human liberty are values shared universally by all peoples and individuals regardless of governmental institutions. This does not mean that North American democratic institutions will immediately become the norm in all of Latin America. On the contrary, the military in most countries will remain in power in one form or another for the foreseeable future. What it does mean, however, is that most governments now appear ready and able to curb and possibly even to prevent the abuse of human rights that has occurred in the past.

The most dramatic new breakthrough occurred last week in Chile when President Pinochet announced his decision to abolish the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA). New guidelines suggest that most of DINA's personnel will be absorbed by a National Information Center which will be subordinate to the Interior Ministry. In addition, DINA's arrest and detention powers are being transferred to the national police (Carabineros) and the Judicial Police within the Defense Ministry. While illegal activity is still possible under this arrangement, it appears that opportunities for repressive practices will be greatly reduced.

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-- The new agency will not report directly to the president.

-- Both the Carabineros and the Judicial Police are highly regarded professional law enforcement organizations.

-- Government sources report that Pinochet is now convinced that the Marxist threat to his regime has diminished significantly.

Pinochet's decision on DINA closely follows his announcement earlier last week that Chile would begin a phased transition of power to civilian rule culminating in limited popular elections by 1985. Chile thus joins the governments of Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Uruguay that have announced their intention to hold elections in the next several years. NR

Argentina reportedly has plans to direct its police to protect the rights of nonviolent political opposition. There also has been a reported change in the way in which the security services select subversive targets. In order to detain a suspect, it will now be necessary to have sufficient proof that the suspect is, in fact, a subversive. The government is ordering the release of certain persons under arrest, and lists are being published in the press. Some persons who had previously "disappeared" have been placed at the disposition of the executive authority for trial and, depending on their charges, will be tried in either civilian or military courts. Finally, the National Intelligence Center will be abolished at the end of the year and its personnel will be reintegrated into their original organizations. Operations against subversive organizations,

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which have been the responsibility of the Center, will be taken over by the armed forces, principally the army. Despite these changes, however, the government has increasingly resorted to violence and abuse of human rights for internal political purposes not directly connected to the campaign against terrorism.

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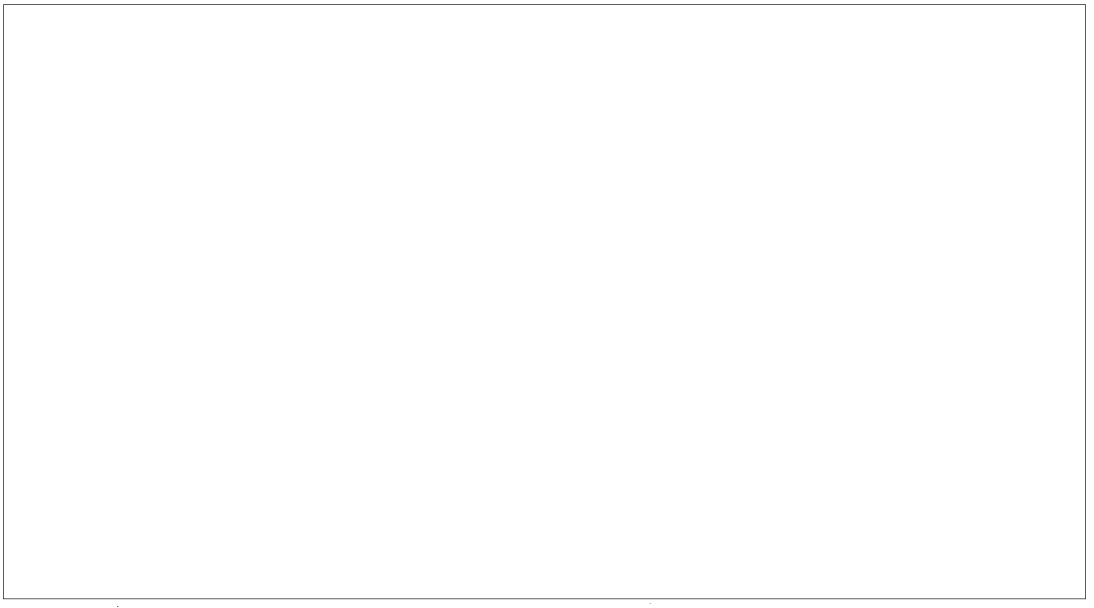

Reasons for Change

There are a variety of reasons for Latin America's changing view of the US human rights policy. In particular, there is a growing belief in the region that Washington's defense of human rights has become the major focus of US foreign policy. In that context, many Latin Americans believe that it is useless to try to change the global strategy of a super power, which in the past has paid little attention to their arguments or existence.

The Chileans, for example, have been debating whether the risks of internal subversion are so great that they have to risk jeopardizing their traditional good relations with the US, especially when there is no alternative benefactor. Thus, defending internal security raises the question of external security--particularly regarding the possibility of war with Peru. A

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June editorial in the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* summed it up best: "One does not have to stand fast nor ask for understanding from a wave breaking over him. One must duck and let it pass over. So it is in small countries' relations with large ones."

Another factor in the changing outlook is that the internal security threat in the countries under military rule has diminished. Chilean President Pinochet and Argentine President Videla, for example, both appear to be confident that subversives, while they can cause isolated incidents, can no longer challenge the authority of the government or the process of forming new institutions. The Uruguayans and Paraguayans appear somewhat less confident in this regard. Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru have shown that they can handle potential disruptions. The El Salvadoreans have not yet been seriously challenged.

The argument would seem to follow that if draconian measures are no longer needed to maintain the security of the state, the country can move toward a full rule of law and normal political activity. Ecuador's announced return to civilian rule in 1978 and the subsequent announcements by Peru and Bolivia that they also would hold elections in coming years seems to have had a positive effect on Chile and Uruguay in that neither country wants to be isolated from a prevailing political trend. Moreover, none of the military governments wants to admit that a return to the rule of law would weaken its ability to maintain internal security.

In addition to these positive factors for change on the human rights issue, there are several bilateral and multilateral problems among the South American nations that have continued to work against closer relations in general and anti-US attitudes in particular. The threat of war in the Andes, resulting primarily from Lima's acquisition of large quantities of sophisticated Soviet arms, still inhibits full cooperative relationships among Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. There is also the continuing problem of Bolivian access to the sea. Chilean-Argentine relations, in general,

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have been good, but now there is some irritation because of the territorial dispute over the Beagle Channel. Argentine-Brazilian relations had been improving, but controversy over problems associated with the Itaipu Dam on the Parana River are causing difficulty. Brazil, in any case, has true international aspirations and does not want to get bogged down in any regional squabbles.

Outlook: Change, but No Change

Most Latin American governments are demonstrating that they are ready to accept the new US policy on human rights at least in theory, even though there may be some backsliding in some countries if security or other problems arise. The issue of democratic government, however, is another story. Most of the countries under military domination have come through some rough, unpleasant times combatting insurgency, disorder, and the "old politics." The military probably is not ready or willing to allow this situation to recur.

In any case, Latin Americans have not had much experience with national representative government. Democracy in the area, in fact, has always been more accurately described as elite government with lip service being paid to the terms "popular suffrage" and "parliamentary government." The urge to play at being "democratic" and creating institutions that suggest self-government has forever been present. The bottom-line in Latin America, however, has always been prosperity and economic security over democratic institutions.

Right now, and for the foreseeable future, the military seems to be the only traditional institution with the discipline, power, and ability to provide a framework for economic and political stability in Latin America. The type of government that develops during the next decade--the time frame for the projected return to "democracy" in most countries--will have some similarities to North American democratic institutions, but will have some significant differences. The most important variance probably will be that significant

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policies and decisions will be made by the military either as direct participants in government or as background directors. [redacted] 3.5(c)

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